

VZCZCXYZ0002
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0537/01 0591644
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 281644Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6892
INFO RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 000537

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2020
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: COALITION PROFILE: THE IRAQI NATIONAL ALLIANCE

REF: A. 09 BAGHDAD 0036
 B. 09 BAGHDAD 2386
 C. 09 BAGHDAD 3175
 D. 09 BAGHDAD 3176
 E. 09 BAGHDAD 2910
 F. 10 BAGHDAD 0304
 G. 09 BAGHDAD 2879
 H. 09 BAGHDAD 2704
 I. 10 BAGHDAD 0121
 J. 10 BAGHDAD 0436
 K. 10 BAGHDAD 0520

Classified By: Acting Political Minister-Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons
1.4 (b, d)

1. (C) Summary: The Iraqi National Alliance (INA) was officially formed on August 24, 2009 and is often seen as the successor of the pan-Shi'a United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), which captured a plurality of votes in the 2005 national elections. Comprised of 32 entities, including a small number of token Sunni figures, the INA stands as the strongest competition to PM Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA) for the Iraqi Shi'a vote. The INA candidate list contains prominent names from across the Iraqi Shi'a political arena, including several prospective candidates for Iraq's next Prime Minister. Current tensions between the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Sadrist Trend -- the two biggest components of the INA -- will likely increase, leading to the coalition's probable breakup after the elections. The INA enjoys strong name recognition and party loyalty, but its electoral prospects will be limited by its sectarian image and its close ties to Iran. Based on available information, we believe the INA may win roughly the same share of parliamentary seats as the SLA. Elements of both coalitions will likely ally after the elections to ensure Shi'a primacy in the next government. End Summary.

INA Component Parties -----

2. (C) Those parties that factor most prominently in the INA include ISCI, Badr Organization, the Sadrist Trend, the National Reform Trend, the Iraqi National Congress (INC), Fadhila, and the Solidarity Bloc. Also included on the INA ballot is fugitive parliamentarian and Kata'ib Hizballah leader Jamal Ja'afar Ali al-Ibrahimi (aka Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis), one of the IRGC's main Iraqi proxies. The leading figure of each of these parties is listed below:

-- ISCI: Chairman Ammar al-Hakim
-- Badr Organization: Secretary General Hadi al-Amiri
-- Sadrist Trend: Muqtada al-Sadr (residing in Iran)
-- National Reform Trend: Ibrahim al-Ja'afari
-- Iraqi National Congress: Ahmed Chalabi
-- Solidarity Bloc: Qassim Daoud
-- Fadhila: Hassan al-Shimmari

INA Leadership Profiles -----

13. (S) ISCI and the Sadrist Trend, led by Ammar al-Hakim and Muqtada al-Sadr respectively, are the two most prominent blocs within the INA. Though the INA has no clear political figure head, Hakim's extensive efforts to burnish his leadership credentials as the new head of ISCI, coupled with Sadrist opposition to engagement with U.S. officials and Sadr's current residence in Iran, have allowed Hakim to emerge as a leading voice within the INA. (Note: ISCI and the Badr Organization are closely linked and often times ISCI/Badr leaders speak with one voice; statements made by Hakim on behalf of ISCI are often informed and supported by Badr Secretary General Hadi al-Amiri. End Note.)

--Ammar al-Hakim: Hakim was formally selected in September 2009 to succeed his late father, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, as ISCI Chairman and has since been working to consolidate his leadership as he counters questions about his relative youth and inexperience. Reflecting the views of several other senior contacts, Ayad Allawi told A/DCM on February 2 that in his assessment, Hakim is still trying to hold his own against old guard heavyweights in ISCI, to include Humam al-Hammudi Qold guard heavyweights in ISCI, to include Humam al-Hammudi and VP Adil Abd al-Mahdi. Hakim is a well-educated and articulate interlocutor, with a quick sense of humor. In meetings he welcomes input from ISCI/Badr advisors and colleagues, despite at times acknowledging that their opinions differ. Over the fall of 2009, we noted a marked shift in ISCI messages, reflecting a more moderate tone in an effort to de-emphasize sectarian themes, accompanied by an increase in regional engagement. (Note: Hakim conducted a tour of capitals in nearby Arab states after becoming ISCI Chairman. End Note.) Hakim has drawn a distinction, for example, between rank and file former Ba'ath Party members who joined for pragmatic career reasons, versus "Saddamist Ba'athists" who committed crimes against the Iraqi people. This course correction is likely part of an effort to increase ISCI's appeal to prospective voters.

--Muqtada al-Sadr: Sadr emerged as the leader of the Sadrist Trend following the death of his father and two older brothers in 1999 and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Iraq. He has resided in Iran since 2007, where he is said to be working on his religious studies, with the reported intention of acquiring the status of Ayatollah. Sadr is frequently rumored to be returning to Iraq; past reports of his imminent return have not come to pass. Sadr is often referred to as paranoid and distrustful, even of those in his inner circle, and has a known tendency to replace those he thinks have become too powerful and thereby pose a threat to his authority. Like Hakim, Sadr maintains close financial and political ties to Iran.

Key INA Political Figures

14. (S) The following are key political figures within the INA, including several prospective candidates for the post of prime minister in the next government.

--Vice President Adil Abd al-Mahdi (1st on INA list in Dhi Qar): Iraq's Shi'a VP is both a candidate in the upcoming national election and one of the most oft-mentioned frontrunners to be Iraq's next PM. Abd al-Mahdi, in conjunction with Hakim, has worked to push ISCI to the forefront in promoting relations with neighboring Arab states, while still stressing the importance of Iraq maintaining strong relations with both Washington and Tehran. (Note: Despite ISCI's overtures, some Sunni Arab states, most notably Saudi Arabia, would likely remain suspicious of an INA-led government. End Note.) Western educated and with a PhD in economics, Abd al-Mahdi is one of the only PM candidates who boasts a clear economic vision for Iraq (ref A). Abd al-Mahdi and Iraqiyya leader Ayad Allawi are reportedly KRG President Barzani's preferred candidates to succeed Maliki, while an ISCI spokesperson on January 11 announced the party's backing of both Abd al-Mahdi and Minister of Finance Baqir Jabur al-Zubaidi (AKA Bayan Jabr)

as the next prime minister. (Note: Abd al-Mahdi was a leading candidate for Prime Minister in 2006, and remains keenly aware of the perceived U.S. role in opposing his premiership. End Note.)

--Sheikh Humam al-Hammudi (1st on INA list in Sulaymaniyah): Hammudi is a Shi'a cleric and ISCI COR bloc leader; he is currently the Chair of both the Council of Representatives (COR) Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) and Foreign Relations Committee. As a drafter of the Iraqi Constitution and CRC Chair, Hammudi worked unsuccessfully to push through a constitutional amendments package in early 2010, which, among other things, would have reigned in some of the PM's powers. Hammudi was -- and likely remains -- critical in private of Ammar al-Hakim succeeding his father as the head of ISCI, but has refrained from openly criticizing Hakim's leadership. Hammudi is sympathetic to the Iranian government (ref B) and bristles at what he perceives to be U.S. intervention in Iraqi politics (see para 7 below).

--MP Hadi al-Amiri (1st on INA list in Diyala): Amiri is the Secretary General of the Badr Organization and Chair of the COR Security and Defense Committee. Amiri is a leading force within ISCI/Badr and was a close confidant of the late Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim. In November-December 2009, Amiri surprised many political observers when he emerged as a voice of cross-sectarianism and played a lead mediating role during election law negotiations. Amiri reached out in particular to Sunni and Kurdish leaders to propose an election law compromise which protected Sunni interests and was ultimately accepted by all sides (refs C, D). (Comment: Amiri's new mantle was rather ironic given his direct involvement in interrogating and torturing Sunni Iraqis during the height of sectarian violence; he may still have a difficult time shaking off his past record during post-election government formation negotiations. End Comment.)

--Ibrahim al-Ja'fari (1st on INA list in Baghdad): Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ja'fari (2005-2006) formed the National Reform Trend in 2008 and is currently looking to regain a key role in the Iraqi leadership. Ja'fari as well as National Reform Trend Bloc leader Falih al-Fayyadh as of late have been reluctant to meet with U.S. officials, likely due in part to their intra-coalition alliance with the Sadrist Trend. According to UNAMI contacts as well as DPM Rowsch Shaways, Ja'fari is the Sadrist Trend's preferred PM candidate.

--Ahmed Chalabi (3rd on INA list in Baghdad): Chalabi has earned criticism -- but also popularity and fear -- for his role as a central figure in the de-Ba'athification purge of mostly secular election candidates. MP and SLA candidate Izzat Shabandar, a member of the COR Accountability and Justice Committee, told Poloffs that Chalabi was able to manipulate the de-Ba'ath situation so as to force PM Maliki and other senior Shi'a leaders to accept his will, or face the wrath of an emotional Shi'a body politic. Chalabi is often criticized for his ties to Iran; Allawi, for example, told Ambassador Hill on February 13 that he saw Chalabi as "married" to Iran, and asserted that Chalabi has historically misinformed U.S. policymakers in a manner that played into Iran's hand. Chalabi has openly acknowledged his relations with senior Iranian officials in meetings with Emboffs (ref E).

--Qassim Daoud (7th on INA list in Najaf): Daoud is the head of the Solidarity Bloc, a grouping of independent Shi'a MPs and a former Minister of State for National Security under Iraq's interim government. He was rumored as a possible PM candidate in 2006, but his lack of a strong popular support base -- which continues to this day -- worked against his chances. He has been actively campaigning in Najaf over the last month. Daoud has been a key interlocutor for U.S. officials since 2003, has close ties to Sistani (despite being quite Westernized), and in early February 2010 was selected by the INA coalition's Executive Committee to formally relay INA concerns to the Embassy on the perceived change of U.S. policy toward the Ba'ath Party (ref F).

-- Sadrists: Although the Sadrist Trend holds 30 seats in the current COR, the largest share of any Shi'a party, no strong leading political figure has emerged among Sadrist politicians. Sadrist officials withdrew from Iraqi Ministry positions in April 2007 in protest of the U.S. occupation. However, Sadr appears to now recognize the importance of working through the political establishment, and on October 16 the Sadrist Trend held Iraq's first primary election, in a public show of commitment to the open-list system (ref G). Sadrist officials remain unwilling to engage with U.S. diplomats, but PRToffs have noted low-level engagement with local Sadrist officials who participate in PRT-sponsored training and seminars.

Political Platform: A Unified, Sovereign Iraq

15. (C) The INA's campaign platform, as presented by Ammar al-Hakim, is based on the principles of a unified, sovereign Iraq that draws authority from the constitution, and is run by a strong federal government in conjunction with empowered local administrations and governments. Security and regional engagement are also key elements of the INA platform. Chalabi in late October told Emboffs that the INA would campaign on a platform of anti-corruption and providing services to contrast itself with the current government's failures; however, such themes now appear to have taken a back seat (ref H), particularly as de-Ba'athification has emerged as a prominent issue in the Shi'a-dominated southern provinces.

16. (C) While all INA candidates are theoretically running on a broad coalition-approved platform, individual candidates and component parties have broad leeway to tailor their campaign messages to appeal to local constituencies. For example, Fadhila MP Karim al-Yaqubi told Poloffs in mid-February that his campaign slogan is "Water is Life," a theme he believed would resonate with the many Iraqis. Qtheme he believed would resonate with the many Iraqis connected to the agricultural sector. He said that his personal platform is based on a push for a federal Iraq, as he believes provincial officials, versus the central government in Baghdad, know best what is in the interest of their constituents. Office of the Martyr Sadr Political Committee head Karrar al-Khafaji has said publicly that the issues of detainee releases and prison conditions are key Sadrist political priorities. Additionally, according to Sadrist media outlets, Sadr has mandated that Trend candidates emphasize the importance of an independent Iraq free of U.S. influence, as well as the plight of the oppressed and needy.

17. (C) It appears that some INA candidates are attempting to appeal to Shi'a constituents through criticism of perceived U.S. interference in Iraq's internal affairs. Several key figures in the INA outside the Sadrist Trend, for example, have publicly accused the United States of having pressured the Cassation Chamber to issue a decision on February 3 (subsequently reversed) to delay review of de-Ba'athification appeals by disqualified candidates until after the Iraqi election (ref I). (Comment: Embassy and PRT officials have worked at both the national and provincial level to dispel such accusations and have stressed that the United States has only advocated for transparency and due process in the de-Ba'athification process. End Comment.) This criticism of the United States as a campaign theme may be connected to a change of tone in ISCI's dialogue with the Embassy. While the late Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim recognized the positive role that the United States could and should play in post-Saddam Iraq, his son Ammar and other senior ISCI leaders have recently made clear, albeit politely, that they expect the United States to shift from its current role as a principal into a supporting role when the next government comes to power. During a February 17 meeting with the DCM, Ammar indicated that an ISCI-led government would move away from the current close level of security cooperation with the United States and insist on a lower profile for remaining

U.S. forces (ref J). Humam Hammudi told PolCouns on February 24 that, since Iraq has assumed full sovereignty, the United States would not have a seat at the table for government formation after the March 7 elections (ref K).

Strengths

¶8. (C) Regional Engagement: Whereas PM Maliki has been criticized for his poor relations with neighboring Arab states, while Allawi has been castigated for neglecting domestic voters in favor of engaging regional leaders, INA arguably provides a well-regarded balance between these two extremes. Between mid-November and mid-December, Hakim conducted a regional outreach tour, meeting with senior leadership in Turkey, Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar, Kuwait, and Syria, and stressed the need to develop and strengthen Iraq's relations with its Arab neighbors. Hakim has been unsuccessful, however, in securing an invitation to visit Riyadh.

¶9. (C) Name Recognition and Party Loyalty: The INA candidate roster contains some of the most well-known Shi'a political figures in Iraq, as well as the added name recognition of two of the most prominent Shi'a clerical families, Hakim and Sadr. ISCI, through the Hakim family, is arguably the political entity with the closest ties to Najaf's influential Marja'iyah. (Comment: Unlike the Sadrists, who have a significant following in the Shi'a southern provinces, ISCI does not espouse Iran's "velayat-e-faqih" (rule of the jurisprudent) system of clerical rule. End Comment.)

¶10. (C) Organizational Structure: Of all entities running in the upcoming election, the Sadrist Trend appears to have the best grassroots organizational structure, particularly in the south where voter mobilization and turnout will be key. The Sadrist Trend historically has emphasized the importance of providing social welfare and assistance programs, and as such has established a loyal following and potentially wide voter base. Additionally, many INA candidates, in contrast to the more aloof Iraqiyya coalition candidates, have spent the past month in the provinces in which they are running in an attempt to gain name recognition and demonstrate their local roots so as to win the votes of residents.

Weaknesses

¶11. (C) Sectarian Image: In an Iraqi body politic that is attempting, albeit haltingly, to move toward a nationalist focus and away from the sectarian politics that shaped the 2005 election, the INA is seen as strongly sectarian and more religious than Maliki's SLA. Efforts by Hakim to market its moderate, non-sectarian attributes have done little to dispel this image. Dominated by two of the most well-known Shi'a clerical families, the INA is unlikely to appeal to more Qclerical families, the INA is unlikely to appeal to more secular and nationalist voters; it will capture no meaningful share of the Sunni vote.

¶12. (C) Ties To Iran: The INA is undeniably the coalition with the strongest ties to the Iranian regime. Senior ISCI and Badr leaders stress to U.S. officials the importance of Iraq maintaining close ties to both Washington and Tehran, and even Western-leaning INA officials -- to include VP Abd al-Mahdi and Qassim Daoud -- regularly engage with Iranian leaders. Abd al-Mahdi often makes the point that Iraq cannot afford to be on bad terms with its eastern neighbor; Abd al-Mahdi advisor Raja al-Khalili told Poloffs that the VP follows every trip to Washington with a layover in Tehran. INA officials who spent decades in exile in Iran are sensitive about being labeled Iranian lackeys given strong public mistrust, including in Iraq's Shi'a community, of Tehran's intentions toward Iraq. (Comment: Shi'a tribal leaders are especially wary of Iran, and thus appear to generally favor the SLA or Allawi's Iraqiyya coalition over the INA. End Comment.) Accordingly, they struggle to publicly distance themselves from Tehran, while privately

supporting Iran's objectives for an Islamist Shi'a-led government.

¶13. (C) Internal Divisions: Long-standing tensions exist between ISCI and the Sadrism Trend, which have grown more pronounced as the elections near. During a press conference in Lebanon in late January, ISCI Chairman Hakim inflamed tensions with Muqtada al-Sadr through a statement that "the resistance in Iraq is nothing but a group of murderers and it has no clear features or personalities." Hakim later walked back his remarks to calm the situation, but implied to the DCM on February 17 that differences persist. Sadrism COR member and chair of the COR Legal Committee Baja al-Araji in mid-February was quoted in press as saying his bloc may withdraw from the INA following the election if the coalition partners could not reach consensus on key issues.

Projection of COR Seats

¶14. (C) According to available polling data, the INA ranks second to the SLA among Shi'a voters. The difference between the two coalitions, however, is narrow given the margins of error. We assess that the INA will likely capture close to the same number of seats as the SLA -- in the range of between 65 and 75 seats -- in the next COR.

Post-election Government Formation

¶15. (C) ISCI leadership has repeatedly claimed that the INA is in the best position to form a government relatively quickly because of its good relations with other groups across the Iraqi political spectrum. Hakim made this argument most recently in a February 17 meeting with the DCM and speculated that the SLA and Iraqiyya would have a much more difficult time forming a stable coalition government. Hakim's point is plausible given the strong opposition of many Iraqi political players to Maliki serving a second term as PM. Nevertheless, we expect that at least some INA elements, but probably not the Sadrists, will ally with Maliki's Da'wa party (the main SLA component) after the elections to ensure Shi'a primacy in the next government. Whether they coalesce around Maliki, an ISCI leader, or an alternative figure as their consensus choice for PM depends on how well the parties do in the elections.

HILL